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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT MONDAY, April 28, 1941

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "TOMATOES FOR EVERY GARDEN." Information from the Bureau of Plant Industry, U. S. Department of Agriculture. Publications available: "The City Home Garden," F.B. 1044, and "The Farm Garden," F.B. 1673.

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No matter how small your home vegetable garden is, be sure to have some tomatoes. Have a few plants at least. And, if possible, have enough to supply you with fresh tomatoes all during the growing season and canned tomatoes the rest of the year. Have tomatoes because they add so much to meals in food value as well as in color and flavor, and because they're easy to can. Tomatoes are the easiest of all vegetables to can. Heat penetrates them easily. And they're acid, which makes them can safely at boiling temperature. Tomatoes don't need the high heat of canning under pressure as most other vegetables do. Tomatoes never need to go to waste. You can always can those you can't eat fresh. You can even use the green tomatoes in the fall before Jack Frost catches them.

But that's looking too far ahead. Now let's think about getting the young plants out in the garden so we'll have tomatoes early and on during the season. Way down in the most southern part of the country, families have fresh tomatoes from the garden in the winter, and canned tomatoes in the summer when it's too hot for the plants to live. Up in the northern part of the country it's just the other way around. Along in March home gardeners start tomato seeds in the house. In a couple of weeks the little seedlings have their first true leaves, and then it's time to transplant them to paper pots or strawberry boxes, or to cold frames outdoors. In 6 to 8 weeks when the young plants are strong enough and the weather is mild enough, they can take their permanent places in the garden.

When you set the tomato plants in the garden, put a paper collar around each plant as it goes in the ground to protect it against cutworms. Cutworms have a special fondness for young tender tomato plants. But the worms won't reach plants protected by a paper barrier that goes down into the soil and also stands up 2 or more inches above the ground. The best way to kill cutworms is with poison bait, but in a small home garden paper collars are simpler to use.

What if you haven't started tomato plants from seeds? Does that mean you can't have tomatoes in your garden this year? Not at all. Tomato plants by the thousands are selling at seed stores and even grocery stores this time of year. You can buy yours already started. But, of course, if you buy plants, you may not get just the varieties you would prefer.

People used to think tomatoes didn't need much plant-food. In fact, they used to say enriching the soil with manure would make tomato plants grow all to foliage instead of fruit. Modern plant scientists know better. They realize that tomatoes will thrive in almost any fertile soil that is well cultivated and has enough water. But they find that tomatoes do best in ground prepared with a generous amount of well-rotted manure, supplemented with superphosphate, or with a balanced garden fertilizer high in phosphorus.

By the way, when you set the tomato plants in the garden, set them fairly deep. If the plants are long and spindling, make a trench about 6 inches long and bury a part of the stem along with the roots. This will make stockier plants and stronger ones because new rootlets will be thrown out along the stem.

The tomato is a particularly thirsty plant and will respond to irrigation in dry weather. Sprinkling is not as good as furrow irrigation or application direct to the soil from a pipe or hose because it wets the leaves and fruits. Wetting the leaves is likely to encourage disease and wetting the tomatoes may make them crack more. One of the most common troubles in growing tomatoes is

blossom-end rot. This is due mostly to an uneven supply of water. You can cut it down by keeping the soil evenly and moderately moist.

You'll save space in a small home garden if you prune your tomato plants to a single stem and then tie them to stakes or a trellis. With careful pruning you can set the plants as close as 2 feet apart in each direction. Plants tied to stakes are easy to cultivate. The fruit is clean because it's off the ground, and it ripens earlier. Recent tests at one State experiment station show that tomatoes tied up so the sun reaches them as they grow contain more vitamin C than those that ripen in the shade. But too much sun may cause "sunscald".

Very soon now you can plant tomato seeds for late summer and fall crops. Plant these seeds out in the garden instead of starting them indoors. Pritchard is one of the leading tomato varieties for your mid-season crop. Marglobe and Stone are standard intermediate and late varieties.

The Department of Agriculture in Washington, D. C., publishes 2 free bulletins containing information on growing tomatoes in the home garden. You are welcome to either or both of these bulletins. One is called "The City Home Garden", Farmers' Bulletin 1044. You can order it by name or number. The name of the other is "The Farm Garden", Farmers' Bulletin 1673. A postcard addressed to the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., will bring you copies of these bulletins as long as the free supply lasts.

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